**Amendments to the United States Constitution**

When the founding fathers of this country wrote the Constitution they were aware that as time went on it might be necessary to change or add on to the original Constitution they had written. An amendment is a change or an addition to the United States Constitution. Written into the original Constitution are rules for how the government may go about this process.

**1st Amendment**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The first amendment to the United States Constitution is part of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments added to the Constitution. It came into effect in 1791. The first amendment prohibits the United States government from establishing an official religion for the country. It also prohibits the government from making any laws, which deny someone the right to practice whatever religion they choose to practice. The first amendment also guarantees several rights that are cornerstones of American democracy. Among the rights protected under the first amendment are freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the right to peacefully assemble. These rights allow the people of America to voice their opinions, whether good or bad, about the government. It also allows the people of America to come together to protest, or challenge the government.

**13th Amendment**

**Section 1.** Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

The thirteenth amendment to the United States Constitution was passed in 1865 after the end of the American Civil War. The amendment officially abolished, or put an end to slavery in the United States. It also established that only as punishment for a crime could someone be forced to work against his or her will. This amendment ensured that all black people being held as slaves in America were free.

**14th Amendment**

**Section 1.** All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

With the passing of the thirteenth amendment in 1865 all black people being held as slaves in America were freed. The fourteenth amendment, passed that same year, recognized these former black slaves as citizens of the United States. The amendment establishes that all people born in the United States are citizens of the country. The amendment also prohibits states from making any laws that deny someone the rights granted to citizens of the United States. The importance of the fourteenth amendment cannot be overstated as it guaranteed African-Americans the same rights as white Americans.

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| **Amendment** | **What rights does the amendment protect?** | **What effect did the amendment have on people’s lives?** | **Why is this amendment important?** |
| **1st Amendment** |  |  |  |
| **13th Amendment** |  |  |  |
| **14th Amendment** |  |  |  |